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POLITICS

Obama Takes First Step in a Cancer 'Moonshot'

By **MICHAEL D. SHEAR** JAN. 28, 2016

WASHINGTON — President Obama signed a presidential memorandum on Thursday creating a White House task force on cancer, the first step in what Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. has called a “moonshot” to cure the disease, administration officials said.

The president appointed Mr. Biden to lead the panel, which will include representatives from at least 13 government agencies. The group’s first meeting will be on Monday, officials said.

The emotional power behind the push will come from Mr. Biden, whose son Beau died last year after a battle with brain cancer. This month in his final State of the Union address, Mr. Obama cited Mr. Biden’s “moonshot” comment, saying that “I’m putting Joe in charge of mission control.”

Mr. Obama pledged in the speech to initiate a governmentwide push to cure the disease along the lines of the effort in the 1960s to send a man to the moon. The president made no specific promises but urged Americans to believe that a cure could be found.

“For the loved ones we’ve all lost, for the family we can still save, let’s make America the country that cures cancer once and for all,” Mr. Obama said.

Officials familiar with the president’s actions said the task force would set a goal of doubling the rate of scientific progress toward prevention, treatment and a cure.

The plan, officials said, is to “put ourselves on a path to achieve in just five years research and treatment gains that otherwise might take a decade or more.” The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity because details of Mr. Obama’s memorandum had not yet been made public.

The memorandum does not commit the government to major new spending, and it is not clear how much progress can be made without new dedicated financial resources.

Instead, officials said the task force would focus on “making the most of federal investments, targeted incentives, private sector efforts from industry and philanthropy, patient engagement initiatives, and other mechanisms to support cancer research and enable progress in treatment and care.”

The group will also seek to “break down silos” among scientists to encourage more cooperation, officials said.

In addition to Mr. Biden, the group includes members from the Departments of Defense, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Energy, and Veterans Affairs. Members will also represent the Office of Science and Technology Policy, the National Cancer Institute, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Science Foundation, among others.

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